

Welcome!

Update on School Breakfast Research

Thanks for joining! We'll get started soon.

**Please enter your name and your district/agency/organization
in the chat box!**





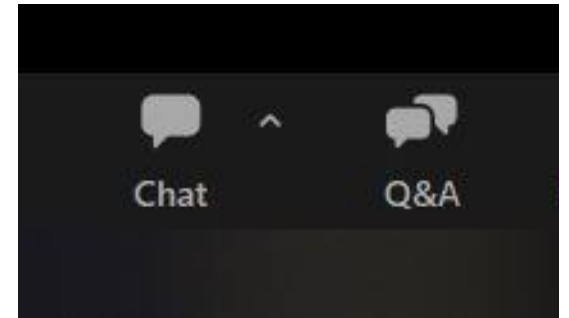
Update on School Breakfast Research

April 2026



Tips for Participation Today

- The webinar & slide deck will be shared via email after the webinar.
- To engage with other attendees, please use the chat box.
- If you have questions, please enter those into the Q&A box.
- Closed captioning is available.



Agenda

- Welcome and Background
- Breakfast Research Findings
- Q&A with Dr. Cohen



Background

- Schools can use breakfast to advance nutrition, health, and academic equity, but many eligible students do not participate in the program.
- Universal free school breakfast (UFSB) and breakfast after the bell (BAB) make breakfast free/convenient, and part of the school day.
- We contracted with Dr. Juliana Cohen to conduct a literature review focused specifically on breakfast policy impacts across student and household outcomes.



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Welcome, Dr. Juliana Cohen!

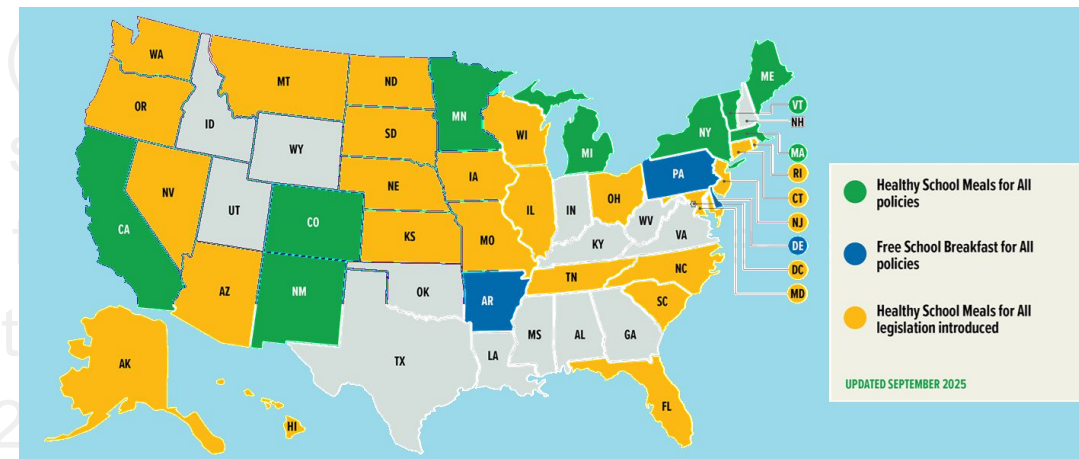
- **Credentials:** PhD, RDN
- Director, Center for Health Innovation, Research, and Policy, Merrimack College
- Adjunct Professor of Nutrition, Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health
- **Research focus:** School nutrition policies and initiatives to improve children's health



Overview of UFSB

- **UFSB is a policy in which all students within a school, district, or state receive breakfast for free.**
- **This can be through:**
 - State-wide UFSB policies which enable all students within a state to receive free school breakfast.

- The Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) allows schools to provide breakfast to all students within higher-poverty schools.
- Provision 2 (household applications) requires household applications to be collected in Year 1 [base year], and then schools can provide breakfast to all students at 30 percent free and reduced for Years 2 and 3.



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Overview of BAB Models

- **BAB provides school breakfasts during the school day, rather than before the start of school, to address the primary barriers to participation (e.g., logistics of arriving early and the stigma) by making school breakfast convenient and the norm among students.**
- **BAB models include:**
 - Breakfast in the classroom (BIC)
 - Grab-and-go breakfast
 - Second chance breakfast



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Current Research on School Breakfast: Overview Methodology

- Searched **PubMed** and **Google Scholar** (start of literature- July 2025) for articles on universal free school breakfast (UFSB) and breakfast after the bell (BAB) policies.
 - Also searched the reference lists of articles & reviewed all articles citing the resultant literature (using Google Scholar)
- Inclusion criteria were:
 - Published peer-reviewed research articles, government agency reports, and grey literature (e.g., reports with data analyses)
 - Published in English among K-12 students in U.S. schools
 - Examined school breakfast served during the school day.



School Breakfast Findings

**What does the evidence say most clearly
about these school breakfast models?**

Overwhelming evidence that UFSB & BAB increase participation

- N=15 studies examining UFSB policies found an increased school breakfast participation (range 4-26 percentage point [%pt] increase)
- N=23 studies examining BAB policies found increased school breakfast participation (range 9-41-39%pt increase)



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**Does offering breakfast universally or
after the bell affect diet quality or
food security for students?**

Diet Quality & Food Security

Overall positive results, but research is more limited examining diet and food security (n=4 studies examining UFSB & n=7 examining BATB)

- UFSB policies were generally associated with improvements in diet/food security (e.g., more fruit/milk consumed and reduced student hunger), particularly among children from low-income households.
- BATB policies were also generally associated with improvements in diet/food security related outcomes
 - While some studies suggested BATB was associated with students consuming two breakfasts, the research found that overall this was not associated with greater total calorie consumption.



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- BAB policies were also generally associated with improvements in diet related outcomes
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**Do these breakfast models
improve attendance?**

Attendance

- Good evidence exists for improvements in attendance among students from low-income households
 - (Evidence among the broader student population is mixed for UFSB & BAB)



**Do these breakfast models
improve academic performance?**



Academic Performance

- Good evidence exists for improvements in academic outcomes (e.g., test scores, GPA, focus, behavior) among subpopulations (i.e., students from low-income households and students who are racial/ ethnic minorities)
 - (Evidence among the broader student population is mixed for UFSB & BAB)

**Currently, what are
the major research gaps?**

Research Gaps

1. Impact on **household finances**
 - a. 3 studies have examined *perceived* impact with UFSB and 0 BAB studies
2. No research on **stigma** (but research on UFSM more broadly)
3. No research on **sense of belonging**
4. Limited research on **mental health** (1 BAB study found teachers *perceived improvements in student internalizing behaviors (e.g., anxiety)*)
5. (UPFs in BAB)



Translation to Reality



What are the biggest challenges you experience/ hear related to school breakfast?

Please put in the chat what you currently experience or hear about regarding challenges with school breakfast.



Getting Teacher/Admin Buy-In

1. Emphasize the academic benefits:
 - a. Benefits for attendance and academics
2. Ask what their specific concerns are (e.g., time, mess, etc.)
 - a. Look for resources that specifically address those concerns (e.g., BIC recipes that are lower mess, internal policies not to include syrup, etc).
 - b. Ask to pilot test an idea in one school and use that as an opportunity to learn
 - c. Get feedback from teachers on what most successful meals in the classroom are (successful meaning both consumption and decreased mess)

<https://www.childnourishlab.org/resources>

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What's on the Menu: A Guide to School Breakfast Standards

School meals are FREE for ALL students!

Schools are *required* to offer a range of healthy foods daily from at least 3 food groups¹.

Did you know that there are strong requirements for whole grains and limits on added sugar for breakfast cereals and yogurt? Many of these foods are made just for schools and are even healthier than the versions you can buy in grocery stores!

1 Milk (Fat Free)

2 Fruit and/or Vegetable (Banana, Apple, Chips)

3 Whole Grain and/or Protein (Muffin, Yogurt, Sandwich, Cereal)

For it to count as a free meal, students have to take 3 food items (and one must be a fruit or vegetable)

*****All students can receive one complete breakfast daily. Schools are not allowed to provide only milk or second breakfasts for free (some schools allow students to purchase these additional items).**

These strong school meal guidelines are associated with many benefits for students including healthier diets (including eating more fruits, vegetables, and whole grains), improved school attendance, and better academic performance³⁻⁴!

Sources:
1. United States Department of Agriculture. Nutrition Standards for School Meals. <https://www.fda.usda.gov/schoolmeals/nutrition-standards>
2. Au et al. Eating School Meals Daily Is Associated with Healthier Dietary Intakes: The Healthy Communities Study. J Acad Nutr Diet 2019;19
3. Geenan & Fox. Updated Nutrition Standards Have Significantly Improved the Nutritional Quality of School Lunches and Breakfasts. J Acad Nutr Diet 2020;20
4. Cohen JF, Hecht AA, McLoughlin GM, Turner L, Schwartz MB. Universal school meals and associations with student participation, attendance, academic performance, diet quality, food security, and body mass index: A systematic review. Nutrients. 2021 Mar 11;13(3):911

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Oatmeal Muffin Squares USDA

These oatmeal muffin squares have some hidden ingredients such as applesauce and low-fat plain yogurt to add flavor and texture. With the addition of brown sugar, nutmeg and cinnamon these are sure to taste great!



<https://healthyschoolrecipes.com/best-grab-go-breakfast-recipes/>

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Supportive Strategies for Schools

1. Student surveys and taste tests (what breakfast foods do they want)?
2. What are trends in the restaurant industry (e.g., “protein bites”)- look to fast food/ fast casual restaurants for ideas
3. Consider innovative ways to provide breakfasts to students, especially in high/middle school
4. Perception vs reality- schools can/should market themselves
5. Low(er) mess foods for classrooms



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Cheesy Egg Bites
Breakfast Entree



**Cinnamon Raisin
Overnight Oats**
Breakfast Entree

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Supportive Strategies for Schools



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About Us



Strategies for Increasing Breakfast Participation at Middle and High Schools

Middle and high schools typically have lower breakfast participation than elementary schools. Middle and high school students have unique needs; therefore, the breakfast program should be adapted accordingly in order to gain buy-in from students and increase breakfast participation. This resource provides strategies on how to modify your school breakfast program to engage middle and high school students and get more students eating breakfast.

CATEGORY

Implementation Support

AUDIENCES

[Educators](#)

[No Kid Hungry Partners](#)

[School Nutrition Staff](#)

DOWNLOAD

Strategies For Increasing
Breakfast Participation at
Middle And High School



Some Additional Supportive Strategies

1. Small steps towards making/assembling food on site can both support taste and alignment with USDA school meal standards (e.g., speed scratch)
2. Take advantage of existing databases and recipes



**Apple Cinnamon Sheet
Pan Pancakes**
Breakfast Entree



Apple Coffee Cake
Breakfast Entree



**Baked Blueberry
Oatmeal**
Breakfast Entree



**Breakfast Banana Rice
Pudding**
Breakfast Entree



Breakfast Burrito
Breakfast Entree



Breakfast Energy Bites
Breakfast Entree

Info for Parents, Teachers, Principals

Separately, our NOURISH Lab team can support infographics for schools as well (in addition to the great resources from No Kid Hungry)

<https://www.childnourishlab.org/resources>

NOURISH Lab
MERRIMACK COLLEGE

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Schools are *required* to offer a range of healthy foods daily from at least 3 food groups¹.

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3. Geores & Fox. Updated Nutrition Standards Have Significantly Improved the Nutritional Quality of School Lunches and Breakfasts. *J Acad Nutr Diet* 2020;120
4. Cohen JF, Hecdt AA, McLoughlin GM, Turner L, Schwartz MB. Universal school meals and associations with student participation, attendance, academic performance, diet quality, food security, and body mass index: A systematic review. *Nutrients*. 2021 Mar 15;13(3):911



Summary

1. UFSB (including CEP/Provision 2) and BAB are two of the most effective strategies to increase breakfast participation
2. Evidence for BAB extend beyond nutrition, including improved absenteeism and academic outcomes (particularly among those at greatest risk)
3. Get student and teacher feedback
4. Consider innovative ways to provide breakfasts to students
5. Market the amazing things schools are already doing
6. Transitioning to more speed scratch can support taste and nutrition standards



A young girl with dark hair in a ponytail is smiling broadly while sitting at a table. She is wearing a grey long-sleeved shirt and blue denim overalls. In the background, there are several clear plastic shopping bags filled with groceries, including a large yellow fruit. To the right, there is a blue and purple carton, possibly of juice or milk. The setting appears to be an outdoor market or a community center with a brick building and trees in the background. A teal rectangular box is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing the text "Questions?".

Questions?



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Utilize our School Breakfast Resource Library

100+ ready-to-use posters, tools and guides!

<https://bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/programs/school-breakfast>

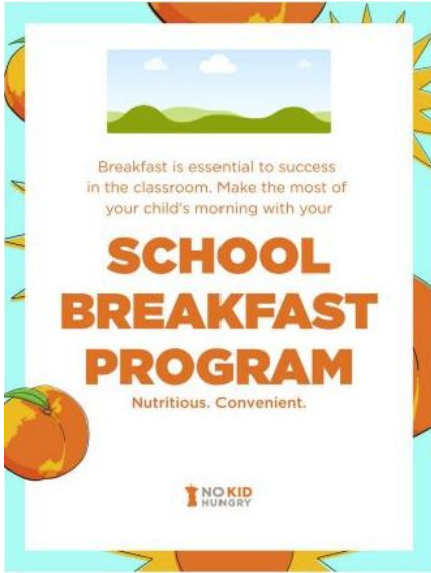




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NEW!
School Breakfast Landing Page

- Quick Start Kit: Breakfast Participation Tools
- **NEW!** Breakfast Posters for 2026!



BREAKFAST BITES



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NO KID
HUNGRY

April 2026

Student-Driven Ideas for School Breakfast

Districts across the country are using simple, student-centered strategies to strengthen breakfast participation.

Here are three practical moves from the field:

Move #1: Host a Student Food Show to Gather Input

What's Working:

Orange County Public Schools (FL) hosted a **breakfast-themed food show** where 250 students from six schools taste-tested 24 potential new breakfast items. If an item received 80% or higher favorable ratings, it was added to the menu.

Students voted using marbles: Each grade level received a different color so staff could compare preferences by age group. Students placed their marbles into a green bottle for "yes" or a red bottle for "no." The bottles were opaque, so

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- Promising Practices for participation
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Thank you!





Questions?